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Precautions make motorcycling fun not fatal

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FORT RUCKER, Ala. (June 4, 2007) –Although May's National Motorcycle Safety Awareness month ended, Soldiers, Family members and DoD civilians need to keep in mind that safe motorcycle practices are a year-round responsibility.

Last month, in support of the national campaign, the Army increased awareness of motorcycle safety in an effort to help its riders prepare for peak riding months and increase safety awareness. However, three Soldiers were still injured and one killed in motorcycle accidents.

While more bikes than ever are registered on Army installations – about 35,000 – safety officials expect the number of accidents to increase proportionately. However, “accidents can be reduced, and many times prevented, by choosing the correct motorcycle and having the proper equipment and training,” stated Sgt. Maj. of the Army Kenneth O. Preston in his Leader's Book Notes for April 2007.

In fiscal 2006, 49 Soldiers were killed in motorcycle accidents. Two-thirds of those fatalities were sergeants or above and over the age of 25. This shows that no matter what a person's rank or riding experience level might be, they can be placed in a bad situation, Brig. Gen. Doyle D. “Don” Broome said.

Broome, deputy commanding general of U.S. Army Cadet Command was involved in an accident while riding his motorcycle last year. The general credits his survival of the accident to training, while others credit the wear of PPE.

“I slid down the highway at about 35 mph, but was wearing all of my PPE and survived the accident,” Broome said. “The same cannot be said for those who died in motorcycle accidents last year, many of whom were not wearing the proper PPE.”

Preston also pointed out in his Leader's Book Notes for April 2007, that the Motorcycle Mentorship Program is another way leaders can set the example for younger, less experienced Soldiers, Family members and DoD civilians. Though Broome has been riding motorcycles since he was a 14-year-old, he's taken the Motorcycle Safety Foundation Course twice.

The MMP is a focused effort where more experienced riders can mentor those that are new to motorcycling, creating a positive environment for conduct and behavior while riding, Preston said.

Many posts and units have established mentoring organizations which Soldier riders can get involved in. Additionally, all Soldiers are required to attend a Motorcycle Safety Foundation course prior to riding a motorcycle. MSF courses are free of charge and can be scheduled through installation safety offices.

Don't become a statistic – prepare to ride by following these simple guidelines:

- Make sure driver's licenses have motorcycle endorsements. Motorcycle safety foundation courses are required and provided by U.S. Army installations to Soldiers and DoD civilians free of charge. Consult the Installation Safety Office on local classes and policies.

- Wear a helmet and other protective gear to include proper eye protection, full fingered gloves, long trousers, long sleeved shirt or jacket, high visibility garments (bright color for day and retro-reflective for night) and leather boots or over-the-ankle shoes. These requirements for Personal Protective Equipment apply to Soldiers at all times, whether riding on or off post. PPE not only provides comfort and protection from the elements, but also prevents injuries and is a means for other motorists to see a rider that's wearing reflective material.
- Don't have a drink and then drive. Consuming alcohol and driving a motorcycle or any motorized vehicle greatly enhances your chances of having an accident. Alcohol affects those skills essential to operate a motorcycle – balance and coordination.
- Preventive maintenance checks and services aren't just for military vehicles. T-CLOCS was developed by the Motorcycle Foundation to assist motorcycle drivers with the inspection of a motorcycle. The inspection covers the areas that should be checked before operating or purchasing a motorcycle such as tires and wheels, controls, lights, oil, chassis and lights. For the complete inspection list visit the USACRC Web site.
- Consider joining a motorcycle club. The USACRC MMP Web site has information on clubs Army-wide as well as safety tips, events and best practices for Soldiers. Currently there are 56 organizations.

For more information on motorcycle safety, visit one of the following Web sites:

U.S. Army Combat Readiness Center
<https://crc.army.mil>

U.S. Army Combat Readiness Center, Motorcycle Mentorship Program
<https://crc.army.mil/mmp>

National Highway Traffic Safety Administration
www.nhtsa.dot.gov

Motorcycle Safety Foundation
www.msf-usa.org